THE MENNONITE CHURCH

of

GERMANTOWN

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The Mennonite Church
of Germantown

The Mennonite Church of Germantown.

1683

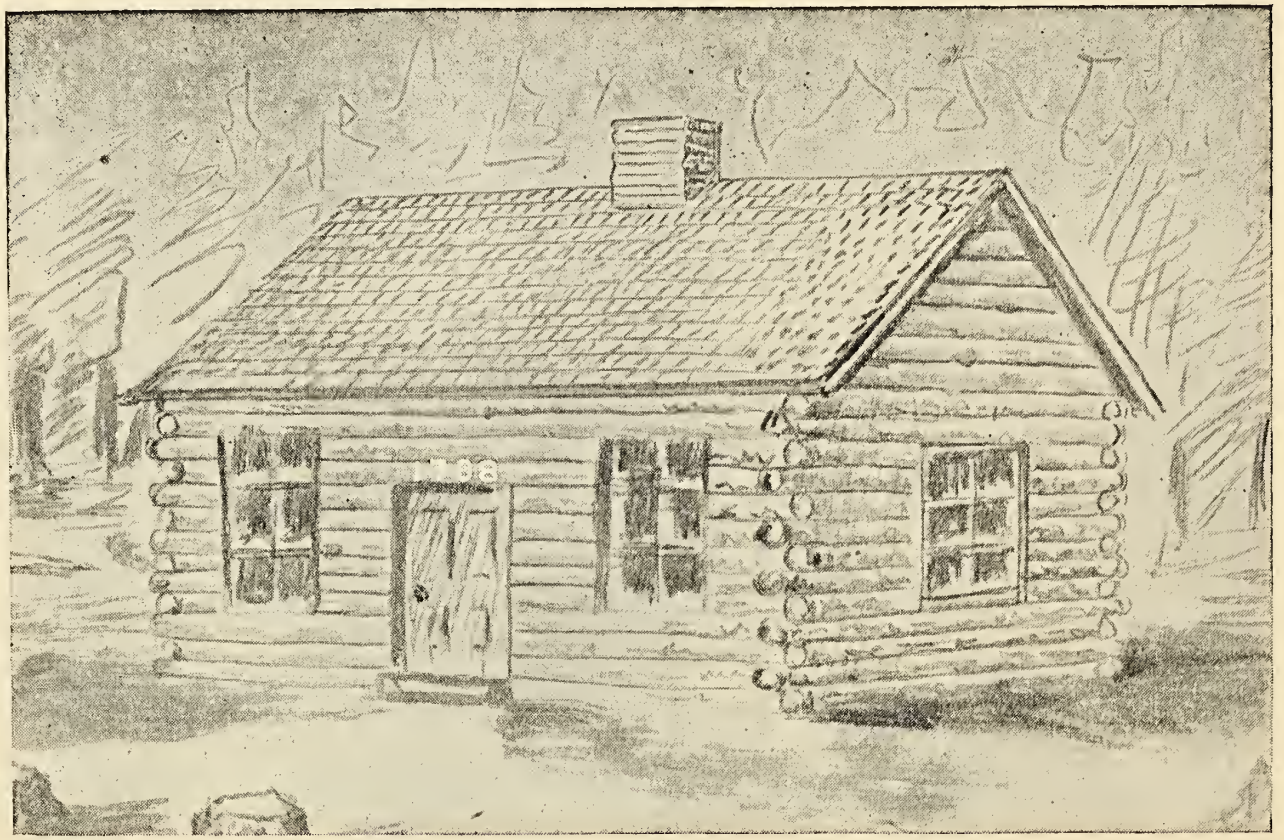
1708 1770

The Mennonite Church OF Germantown.

Remove not the old landmark which thy fathers have set.—Proverbs 22: 28

N. B. GRUBB.

Philadelphia, Pa.
1906



The Log Meeting House, 1708.

Made from traditional descriptions by Elizabeth Klare, Samuel Rittenhouse and several other old people who recalled descriptions made by their parents.

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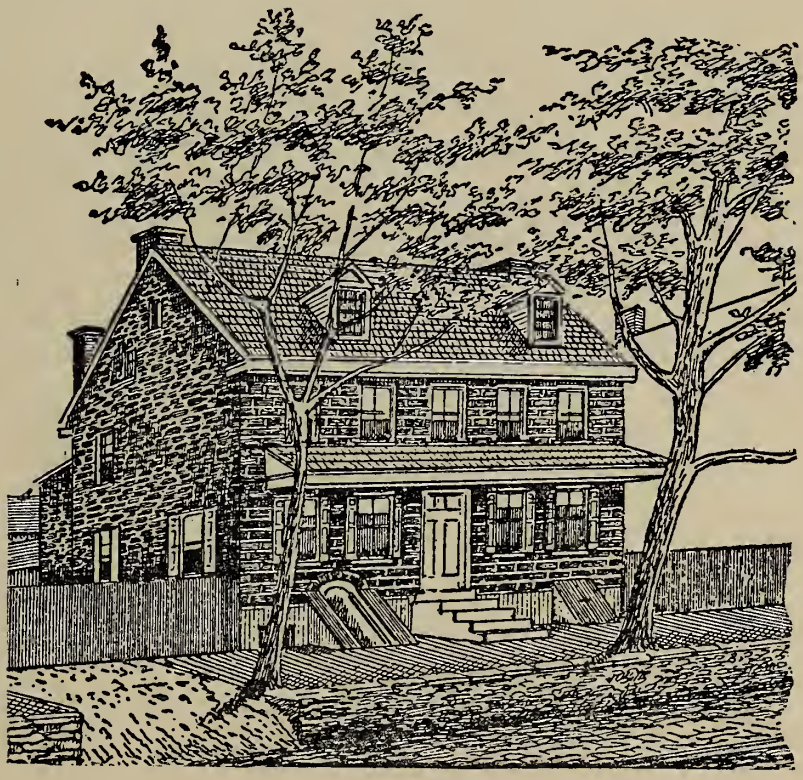
THE Mennonite Church of Germantown had its origin in the little colony of thirteen men and their families, comprising thirty-three persons, nearly all of whom, if not all, related to each other by family ties. They were from the large Mennonite congregation of Crefeld, Germany. Upon the invitation of William Penn they came to establish a home in the New World. They sailed from London on the good ship "Concord," July 24, 1683, and after a pleasant voyage of seventy-four days, they landed at Philadelphia, on October 6, 1683. The heads of these families were, Lenart Arets, Abraham op den Graeff, Dirck op den Graeff, Hermann op den Graeff, Willem Streypers, Thones Kunders, Reynier Tyson, Jan Siemens, Jan Lensen, Peter Keurlis, Johannes Bliekers, Jan Lucken and Abraham Tunes. They were all Mennonites.

"The three op den Graeff's were brothers; Herrmann was a son-in-law of van Bebber; they were accompanied by their sister Margaretha and their mother, and they were cousins of Jan and Willem Streypers, who were also brothers. The wives of Thones Kunders and Lenart Arets were sisters of the Streypers, and the wife of Jan was the sister of Reynier Tyson. Peter Keurlis was also a relative, and the location of the signature of Jan Lucken and Abraham Tunes on the certificate of marriage of a son of Tones Kunders with a daughter of Willem Streypers in 1710 indicates that they too were connected with the group by family ties."—*Settlement of Germantown by S. W. Pennypacker.*

Six days after the arrival of this colony a warrant for land was issued to Francis Daniel Pastorius for their use; and on the twenty-fourth of the same month fourteen tracts were surveyed, and on the next day, October 25, they gathered in the cave of Pastorius and drew lots for the choice of location. Work was at once begun to erect homes for these families. Evidently one of the prominent and well-to-do among them was Thones Kunders. He was the first to built a substantial stone house, part of which still stands at 5109 Germantown avenue, and is now used as a curio shop. This home must have been the centre of activity of the new settlement. Here this little flock met for religious services, and tradition says that William Penn often preached to them here. On the 18th day of April, 1688, a protest against the holding of slaves was framed and signed in this house. The table used on this occasion, which had been brought from Europe, most likely by Thones Kunders, is still in use in the old church. The protest was signed by Gerret Hendricks, Dirck op den Graeff, Francis Daniel Pastorius and Abraham op den Graeff. All but Pastorius were Mennonites. This protest was then conveyed to the Friends Meeting, some of whom were holding slaves. But the Friends could not see their way clear to either accept or endorse the protest, since they "considered it too weighty a matter to decide." Efforts have been made to take the honor of the Protest from the Mennonites and credit it to the Friends, by way of proof claiming that the op den Graeffs had become Friends. The contrary, however, is proven by the notes from the Bible of John William op den Graeff, whose grandfather, Adolphus op den Graeff, was a brother to the op den Graeffs who had

signed the protest. This John William op den Graeff, who had resided at Coblentz on the Rhine, came to Germantown, in 1753, where he was, as he wrote in his Bible, "well received by his cousins, all of whom were Annabaptists, Doopsgesinde or Mennonites."

In 1688 Dirck Keyser, a silk merchant of Amsterdam, Holland, came to Germantown and soon became an important factor in the congregation and the community. In later years, perhaps 1710, he was chosen one of the ministers,



Dirck Keyser House, 1688.

together with Nicholas Rittenhouse. His remains lie buried in the cemetery adjoining the church, in an unmarked grave. In the same year that he arrived he began the erection of a substantial stone dwelling. The location of the house is 6205 Germantown avenue. And now, after two hundred and eighteen years, notwithstanding the many changes that took place around it, it still stands intact and as firm as the day it was built.

In the same year, 1688, William Rittenhouse, also from Amsterdam, came and joined this little colony. He was a paper maker. He set to work at once to erect a paper mill on the banks of the Wissahickon. This was the first paper mill in America. In 1707 he erected a substantial stone dwelling near by. This building still stands and will stand for many more years. In 1690 the congregation called Rittenhouse to become their minister and in 1703 he was made a Bishop, the first in America. He died February 18, 1708.

In 1703 a request, signed by Claas Behren, Paul Roosen, Heinrich van Sintern, Herman Karsdorp and Isaac van Sintern, all of whom had come from the Hamburg-Altona church to Germantown in 1700, was sent to the mother church, that a Bishop be sent to them to ordain a Bishop for the Germantown church. The brethren of the mother church replied that the matter had been under serious consideration, but no one could be found who was willing to undertake the long and perilous journey, and advised them that if their selection was harmonious and peaceable, one of their own number could install the Bishop into his office, with the assurance that the signal blessing of God would rest upon such action; likewise quoting Paul as an example, who baptized believers, although he had not received the ordination. This letter was signed by four ministers of the Hamburg-Altona church, namely, Gerrit Roosen, then 90 years old; Pieter Verhelle, Jacob van Kampen and Jan de Lanoi. This advice seems to have been accepted and one of their own number ordained William Rittenhouse to the office of Bishop. Copies of both these letters are still preserved in the archives of the Altona church.

On October 8, 1702, Jacob Gottschalk and Hans Neues were also chosen ministers. On April 20, 1708, two more ministers were chosen. They were Hermann Kasdorp and Martin Kolb.

In 1702-3, February 10, Arnold van Vossen conveyed three square perches of land to Jan Neues, (Hans Nice) for the use of the congregation on which to build a Meeting House. On September 5, 1714, thirty-five perches more were added for a place to bury the dead. And on April 23, 1852, an additional tract of 25 perches was purchased from Robert H. Thomas for the sum of $600. This latter purchase was then divided into lots and any member, upon the payment of $15, could secure one of the lots for a place of burial for their family. But only members in good standing could become purchasers.

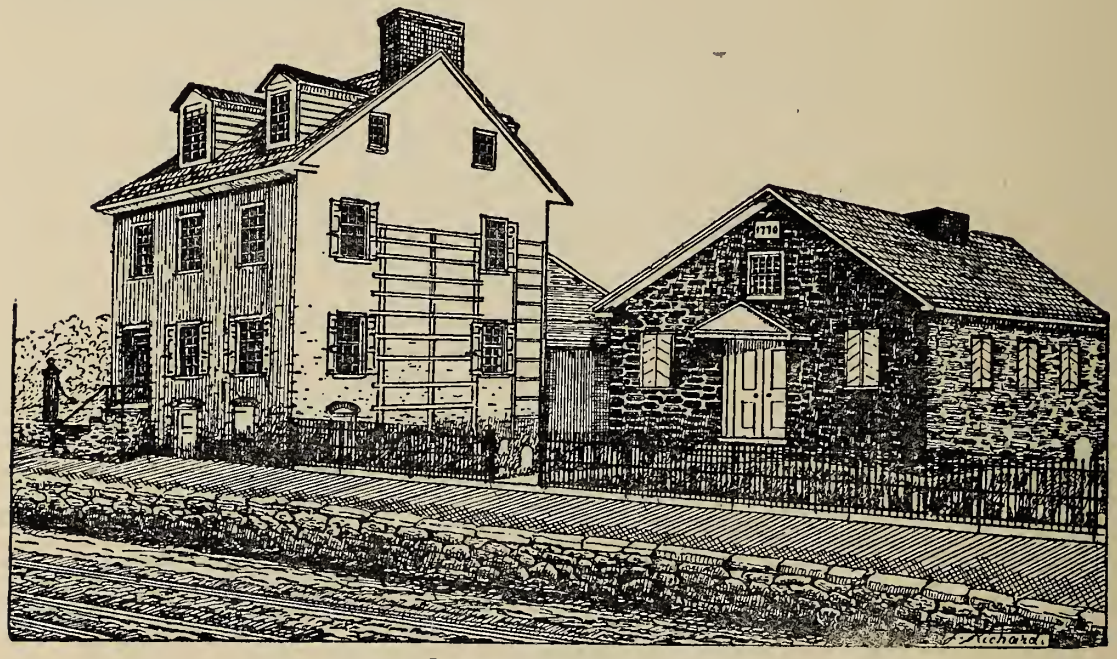
Although the ground for a meeting house was acquired early in 1702, the house was not built before 1708, It was evidently finished early in the spring. On May 9, 1708, Jacob Gottschalk, who now succeeded William Rittenhouse as Bishop or Elder, administered baptism to eleven persons. This first baptismal service by Mennonites in America was followed by the celebration of the Lord's Supper two weeks later, May 23rd. The congregation now numbered fifty-two members. A report given on April 6, 1712, states that the congregation had now extended its borders as far as Skippack and numbered ninety-nine members.

Mennonites now came in larger numbers from Switzerland, Germany and other parts of the Old World and began to spread quite rapidly until the year 1740, when there were more than fifty congregations in Pennsylvania over which eighteen confirmed ministers (Bishops) presided. Some of these congregations had more than one hundred and fifty members.

In 1770, on the 20th day of January, pursuant to an invitation, "a number of the inhabitance of Germantown and people called Mennonites, held a meeting and unanimously agreed upon a plan to erect a new meeting house, and appointed Jacob Keyser, Sr., Nicholas Rittenhouse, Abraham Rittenhouse and Jacob Knor, managers of the said building."

The subscriptions for this new building came from fifty-eight persons, and when the house was completed at a cost of £202 s 5, about $970, there remained a balance of £1 s 19 d 10, which was paid into the general treasury of the church.

The records show that upon the completion of the new church the congregation numbered only twenty-five members. During the following nineteen years, fifty-nine more members were added, thirty-one by baptism, and twenty-eight others who moved into the community from other congregations were received.



A Century Ago.

On May 31, 1789, the communion of the Lord's Supper was administered by Andrew Ziegler, who was now a Bishop in Skippack. On this occasion thirty partook of the sacred emblems while sixteen are recorded as being absent. The congregation at this time was evidently without a pastor. In a letter dated October 27, 1796, from Jacob Oberholtzer of Franconia, to Abraham Kolb of Germantown township, he states that lots had been drawn for ministers to serve the congregation for one year, from November 6, 1796, until October 8, 1797. This indicates that only one preaching service a month was held here.

Again the records fail to inform us of the condition of the church for about fifty years. But it is evident that the congregation did not prosper to any great extent. This may have been due to several causes. No doubt one principal cause was that the community became English while the congregation persisted in having only German preaching. Under the pastorate of John Minnich, who was the last German preacher, and who opposed bitterly the introduction of the English language, a change seemed inevitable. He was succeeded about the middle of the last century by George Hellerman, who preached only in the English language.

Again there came a time when the congregation went a-begging for existence. Pursuant to a public notice issued, calling "a meeting of those interested in the prosperity of Zion in this place," a meeting was held on July 18, 1863; and the congregation re-organized with thirteen members, calling F. R. S. Hunsicker as their pastor, who accepted the call, and during the first year added nine more members to the church. In 1867 Israel Beidler was called to become the pastor and was assisted by Henry A. Hunsicker. Upon the death of Israel Beidler, which occurred February 21, 1876, John M. Halteman and N. B. Grubb, supplied the pulpit for two years, alternating every other Sunday.

On the second day of September, 1863, pursuant to a call for a council meeting, the members met in the church and after due deliberation decided to establish a Sunday School and at once effected an organization, with the pastor, F. R. S. Hunsicker as its Superintendent

In the year 1876, thirteen years after the re-organization of the church by the thirteen members, an application signed by thirteen members, all in good and regular standing, was presented to the Eastern District Mennonite Conference, then in session in the First Mennonite Church of Philadelphia,

praying to be received into the care and charge of the conference and to provide ministers for them that their services may be continued. The request was granted by admitting the congregation into the conference. This was in October, 1876. During these thirty years this relation has remained intact, and the following ministers served the congregation: Henry A. Frederick, Albert E. Funk, N. Bertolet Grubb, Silas M. Grubb, Samuel M. Musselman, Frank F. Gabel, and the present pastor, John W. Bayley. Rev. Bayley entered upon his duties in January 1905, and since then has labored with untiring zeal and self-sacrificing devotion. The congregation now numbers nineteen members. John W. Bayley is the pastor and N. B. Grubb, of the First church is the Elder. Joseph B. Bechtel is the deacon and J. Herman Clow, Edwin Sharpless and N. B. Grubb are the trustees.

Following is a list of the present membership of the church:

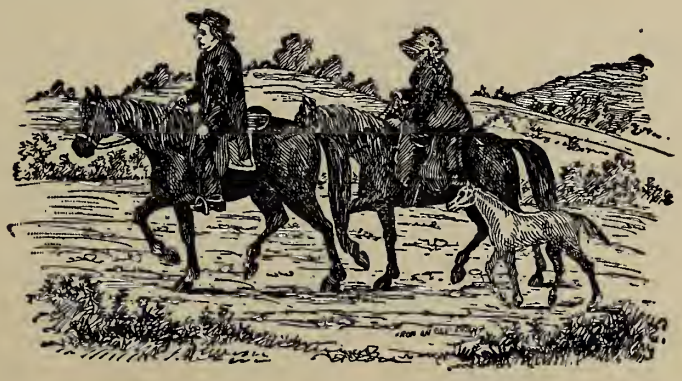
JOSEPH S. BENNER.
SALLIE BENNER.
J. HERMAN CLOW.
ELIZABETH CASSEL.
MARGARET FUNK.
MARY JANE GIVEN.
ANNIE HEFT.
JOHN HOAK.
MATILDA KNOX.
LILLIAN KEEL.
ELIZABETH MURPHY
VIOLA MARKLEY.
HENRY NICE.
MARTHA NICE.
MAUD SCHRACK.
SALLIE SCHRACK.
MARION SCHRACK.
EDWIN SHARPLESS.
WILLIAM UMSTEAD.

The members of the church, under the leadership of the present pastor, deserve much credit for having undertaken the task of renovation and repair. Besides their personal labor and liberal contributions they have been much encouraged by others outside of the church, whose counsel and business experience, together with their generous financial help, have made it possible to accomplish so much. Nota-

bly among these were Mr. and Mrs. Harry Smalley, who counted neither cost nor labor too much to bring order out of chaos. The Sunday School and the Ladies' Aid Society, lately organized, gave liberally out of their treasuries

Advantage is here taken of the occasion to acknowledge the liberal contributions received for these repairs, etc., from His Honor, the Governor, Samuel W. Pennypacker, John H. Converse, George D. Heist and Son, George F. Craig, Frank D. Williams, August Fast, Charles O. Kruger, M. C. Gottshall, Mrs. Susan T. Ball, Joseph B. Bechtel and others.

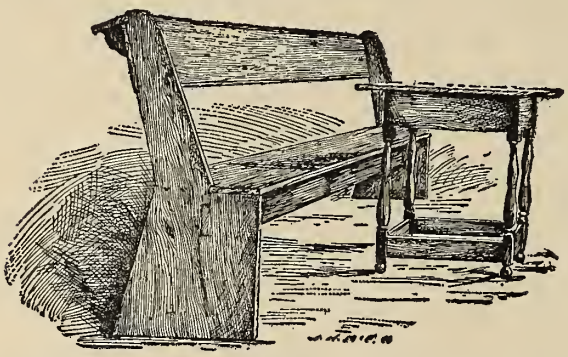
It is said that the old preacher, John Minnich, who was the last of the German preachers, as above noted, whose home was at Dolly Lolly corner, near Shoemakertown, came to the meeting on horseback with his wife, Nanny, riding on behind. Of Heinrich Hunsicker, who lived in Skippack, it is said that it was a common occurrence to see him go out into the fields at two o'clock on Sunday morning and bring a horse home from the pasture. Putting a straw saddle on the horse, he, with his wife seated behind him, would ride to Germantown, both on one horse, a distance of some twenty miles. After preaching they would return to their home the same way.



Tradition states that when the Constitution of the United States was being framed, the Mennonites of Germantown were consulted with regard to their doctrine of religious liberty and non-resistant or peace principles, upon which a

meeting of the members of the church was called and after some discussion a minute setting forth their doctrine was passed and forwarded to the framers of the Constitution, and without scarcely any change was incorporated into the paragraph relating to religious liberty.

It was in the old log meeting house, and afterward in the present building, that the pious Mennonite school master, Christopher Dock, taught school. He was the author of the first book ever published in America on the subject of school teaching He spent his last days in the home of Heinrich Kassel, at Skippack. In the Autumn of 1771 he failed to return to his home one evening and when search was made for him he was found in the school house on his knees, dead.



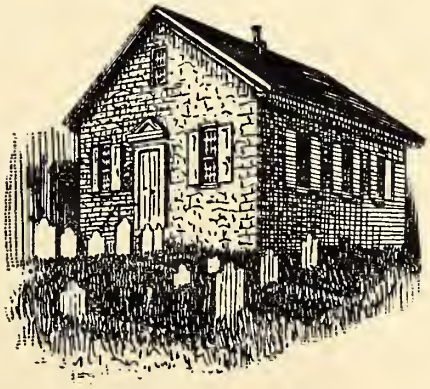
The First Mennonite Church of Philadelphia, located on Diamond street above Fifth, was organized October, 1865. The present membership is 437. The pastors in charge have been, Samuel Clemmer, Andrew B. Shelly, Levi O. Schimmel, Albert E. Funk, and the present pastor, N. B. Grubb, who has been in charge since October, 1882. The Sunday School was organized May 3, 1868, and now numbers 496.

The Second Mennonite Church had its beginning in a Mission Sunday School which was established February 9, 1894. In 1898, the First Church purchased the corner of Franklin street and Indiana avenue, and erected a church thereon. On Friday, May 5, 1899, the congregation was organized with thirty members, and Silas M. Grubb was called as the pastor. The congregation now numbers 95 members and has a prosperous Sunday School with an enrollment of 236.

The old Mennonite Brethren organized a Mission located at the N. W. corner of Dauphin and Amber streets. The

Mission is in charge of Sisters Musselman and Denlinger. Preaching services are regularly conducted by visiting ministers. The Sunday School is in charge of J. Bleam Bechtel, the Superintendent.

The Mennonite Brethren in Christ have a Mission on Germantown Avenue above Dauphin street, known as the Gospel Herald Mission. Besides preaching, and tent services during the Summer, and open air meetings, it is the training school for ministers and church and mission workers.



Following is a list of ministers, as far as could be ascertained, who have preached for a longer or shorter period in the Germantown church since its beginning:

William Rittenhouse.
Jacob Gottschalk.
Hans Neues.
Herman Karsdorp.
Martin Kolb.
Dirck Keyser.
Nicholas Rittenhouse.
John Gorgas.
John Conrads.
Jacob Funk.
Andrew Ziegler.
Matthias Pennypacker.
Abraham Oberholtzer.
Heinrich Pennypacker.
David Ruth.
Joseph Showalder.
Jacob Oberholtzer.
John Hoch.
Abraham Wismer.
Jacob Gross.
Christian Haldeman.
Johann Berge.
Heinrich Hunsicker.
John Minnich.
George Hellerman.
F. R. S. Hunsicker.
Israel Beidler.
Abraham Hunsicker.
Henry A. Hunsicker.
John M. Halteman.
N. Bertolet Grubb.
William McCarthar.
Henry A. Frederick.
Albert E. Funk.
Silas M. Grubb.
Samuel M. Musselman.
Frank F. Gabel.
John W. Bayley.

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